



Checklist Managing Field Trips in K-12 Schools

Are your students safe on field trips? A review of United Educators' claims shows that injuries can result when educators are ill-prepared to lead students on educational ventures off school grounds. Consider the following:

- Without the knowledge of administrators, a group of teachers organized a class ski trip. When a student fell off a ski lift and fractured her femur and wrist, a lawsuit was filed against the school.
- In violation of school policy, chaperones allowed students to purchase crossbows on a field trip. A student was shot in the eye with an arrow and the injured student's parents sued the school.

To keep students safe and avoid similar claims, this checklist gives K-12 administrators an overview of sound risk management practices for planning school field trips. For each question, check the appropriate "yes" or "no" box. Review any box checked "no" to determine whether the suggested practice is possible. Use the "actions needed" box to identify any follow-up actions your school may wish to take.

Approval Process

■ **Policy.** Does your school have a written field trip policy that addresses:

▫ Acceptable locations for field trips, such as:

- Local area, such as town, city, or county? Yes No
- In state? Yes No
- Out of state? Yes No
- International? Yes No

Actions Needed

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▫ Acceptable durations for field trips, such as:

.....
• School hours? Yes No

.....
• All day? Yes No

.....
• Overnight? Yes No

.....
• More than two days? Yes No

.....
▫ Appropriate activities for field trips considering the students':

.....
• Age? Yes No

.....
• Maturity? Yes No

.....
• Grade level? Yes No

.....
• Health needs? Yes No

.....
• Physical abilities? Yes No

.....
▫ People allowed to attend field trips, such as:

.....
• Parents/guardians? Yes No

.....
• Faculty/staff? Yes No

.....
• Chaperones? Yes No

.....
• Students from other schools? Yes No

.....
▫ Individuals involved in the approval process, such as:

.....
• Superintendent, board of education, or board of directors? Yes No

.....
• Head of school or principal? Yes No

.....
• The chief financial officer or other school official responsible for overseeing risk management? Yes No

.....
• Legal counsel? Yes No

.....
• Student health and counseling? Yes No

.....
• School security? Yes No

Actions Needed

Actions Needed

-
- Grounds for suspending or canceling approved field trips, such as:
-
- Inclement weather? Yes No
 - Crime or emergency situations? Yes No
 - Financial or budget constraints? Yes No
 - Failure to follow the application process? Yes No
-

▮ **Application.** Does your school require faculty or staff to use a written field trip application? Yes No

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▮ Does your written application:

.....

- Request the following:
-
- A description of the particular risks? Yes No
 - An estimated number of students who will participate? Yes No
 - The number of teachers and chaperones who will attend? Yes No
 - A description of transportation requirements? Yes No
 - Plans for orientation of students, employees, and chaperones prior to and at the trip location? Yes No
-
- Include deadlines, such as:
-
- Submitting the application (recommended at least one month before the field trip, and several months for overseas trips)? Yes No
 - Inspecting the site location (recommended at least three weeks before the field trip)? Yes No
 - Arranging transportation (recommended at least two weeks before the field trip)? Yes No
 - Receiving signed legal and medical documents (recommended at least one week before the trip)? Yes No
 - Confirming transportation arrangements (recommended about 48 hours before the trip)? Yes No
-
- Prohibit advertising or promoting the field trip before it is approved? Yes No
-
- Emphasize the importance of accurately communicating with parents/guardians about the nature of the field trip activities, the potential for injuries, and the physical requirements of the trip? Yes No
-

Identifying and Inspecting the Location

■ Prior to the field trip, does the faculty or staff member leading the trip:

▫ Identify all trip-related facilities and needs, such as:

• Classrooms? Yes No

• Theaters? Yes No

• Athletic facilities? Yes No

• Parking? Yes No

• Food service venues? Yes No

• Accessible restrooms? Yes No

▫ Inspect the safety of the field trip's facilities by reviewing issues, such as:

• Tripping hazards? Yes No

• Impediments to supervising students? Yes No

• Parking? Yes No

• Construction or maintenance work? Yes No

▫ Eliminate or develop a plan to manage any safety issues identified at the location? Yes No

▫ Consult with staff who led the same field trip about potential risks and safety issues? Yes No

Selection and Preparation of Employees and Volunteers Leading Field Trips

■ **Health.** Does your school require field trip attendance by employees with training in:

▫ First aid? Yes No

▫ CPR? Yes No

▫ Automated external defibrillators (AED)? Yes No

Actions Needed

Actions Needed

■ **Due diligence.** For employees and volunteers with access to minors, do you conduct:

-
▫ Criminal background checks? Yes No
-
▫ Reference checks? Yes No
-
▫ Personal interviews? Yes No

■ **Training.** Do you train all employees and volunteers on:

-
▫ Supervising students during structured and unstructured time including:
 -
• Meal times? Yes No
 -
• Bathroom trips? Yes No
 -
• Free-time activities? Yes No
 -
• Nighttime (if overnight field trip)? Yes No
-
▫ Managing student behavior without using corporal punishment or verbal abuse? Yes No
-
▫ Taking attendance and reporting missing students? Yes No
-
▫ Following emergency procedures for likely field trip emergencies? Yes No
-
▫ Following student health care procedures and policies? Yes No
-
▫ Completing incident or accident reports? Yes No
-
▫ Identifying and reporting allegations of child abuse or sexual misconduct, including those by or against anyone involved with the field trip? Yes No

■ **Supervising.** To ensure students are properly supervised, do you:

-
▫ Provide enough employees and volunteers to meet or exceed the minimum ratios established by state regulation or, as appropriate, the field trip site? Yes No
-
▫ Screen additional chaperones to have on call in case one does not show or is asked to leave? Yes No
-
▫ Follow a policy for investigating alleged wrongdoing, such as the physical or sexual abuse of a student? Yes No
-
▫ Prevent unsupervised access to students by anyone who is the subject of an investigation for wrongdoing until the investigation is complete? Yes No
-
▫ Observe chaperones regularly? Yes No
-
▫ Promptly address any observed inappropriate chaperone behavior? Yes No

Actions Needed

■ **Overnight trips.** On overnight trips, does your school:

- Require at least one adult chaperone for every eight students? Yes No
- Require at least one male and one female chaperone over the age of 21 if the field trip is coeducational? Yes No
- Permit students to gather only in public areas, such as a hotel lobby or restaurants? Yes No
- Set rules and expectations on sexual conduct and provide them to students, parents, teachers, and chaperones? Yes No

Contracts and Insurance With Outside Providers

■ If your institution contracts with an outside provider to facilitate the field trip, do you:

- Evaluate the company's experience and qualifications, such as:
 - Its history running similar programs? Yes No
 - References from other schools? Yes No
 - Its approach to risk management? Yes No
 - Address the following issues in a written contract:
 - The company's emergency and crisis management protocols? Yes No
 - Insurance and travel assistance services available? Yes No
 - The vetting process for charter bus companies or other on-site vendors? Yes No
 - How the outside party will share responsibility with the school for any claims, losses, or injuries that arise out of field trip activities? (This contract language is often called an "indemnity," "hold harmless," or "risk allocation" provision). Yes No
 - What lines of insurance the outside party must carry to cover the claims, losses, or injuries that might arise out of field trip activities? Yes No
 - Requiring the outside party to provide a certificate of insurance showing that it carries the necessary lines? Yes No
 - Possible naming of the school as an additional insured on the outside provider's insurance policies? Yes No
 - Resolution process for disputes arising out of the program? Yes No
- **Authority.** Are employees prohibited from signing contracts with outside providers before the trip is approved? Yes No

- **Ethics.** Has your school consulted state ethics laws to determine whether employees or volunteers are allowed to receive compensation, travel benefits, or gifts from outside services who organize the trip? Yes No

Risk Transfer

- Are students and their parents required to sign a release, assumption of risk form, or permission form that includes:

- A list of all field trip activities? Yes No
- The potential risks? Yes No
- The school's policy on administering medications? Yes No
- What items are allowed and forbidden on the field trip? Yes No

- Does legal counsel:

- Advise which document—a release or assumption of risk form—is appropriate for students and parents to sign? Yes No
- Review any proposed release, assumption of risk form, or permission form before use? Yes No

Emergency Planning

- Do you have procedures for:

- Handling emergencies, such as:
 - Alleged physical or sexual abuse of a student? Yes No
 - Fire? Yes No
 - Weather? Yes No
 - Crime? Yes No
 - Lost or missing student, teacher, or chaperone? Yes No
 - Death, illness, or injury of student, teacher, or chaperone? Yes No
 - Natural disasters? Yes No
- Providing emergency transportation of students, teachers, or chaperones at all times? Yes No
- Communicating in a crisis by providing factual and up-to-date information with students, staff, parents, the media, and others? Yes No

Actions Needed

Actions Needed

■ After an incident or emergency, does your school:

-
▫ Document student code of conduct violations? Yes No
-
▫ Document violations of school rules by employees or chaperones? Yes No
-
▫ Complete an accident or incident report? Yes No

Transportation

■ **Driver qualifications.** At least one month before the field trip, does your school require that all potential drivers of vehicles transporting students:

-
▫ Demonstrate a driving record free of moving violations or offenses? Yes No
-
▫ Provide a license that is appropriate for the vehicle to be driven? Yes No
-
▫ Pass a safe-driving exam? Yes No
-
▫ Receive training on passenger safety issues, such as:
 -
• Loading and unloading passengers including those with disabilities? Yes No
 -
• Handling a vehicle breakdown? Yes No
 -
• Evacuating the vehicle? Yes No
 -
• Controlling student behavior while driving? Yes No
 -
• Conducting vehicle safety checks? Yes No
 -
• Following accident procedures? Yes No
 -
• Orienting passengers on safety procedures? Yes No

■ **Vehicle safety.** Do you require that all vehicles transporting students:

-
▫ Contain first aid kits? Yes No
-
▫ Are evaluated for mechanical soundness? Yes No

■ **Leasing, renting and chartering vehicles.** When leasing, renting, and chartering vehicles, can you demonstrate that the provider selected:

-
▫ Maintains its vehicles? Yes No
-
▫ Conducts safety checks of its vehicles? Yes No
-
▫ Verifies its drivers' driving records and experience? Yes No
-
▫ Trains its drivers on passenger safety issues? Yes No

Health and Medical Care

■ **Specific needs.** At least two weeks before the field trip, does your institution plan for specific student needs, such as:

- Accommodations identified in an individualized education program? Yes No
- Physical or learning disabilities? Yes No
- The attendance of specialized employees on the field trip, such as:
 - Counselors? Yes No
 - Cafeteria personnel? Yes No
 - Special education teachers? Yes No
 - Nurses? Yes No
- Those identified through a review of each student's health information? Yes No
- Are employees and volunteers attending the field trip alerted about students with specific needs? Yes No

■ **Medical care.** Do you require students and their parents to sign a permission form allowing the school to provide routine medical care and seek emergency medical treatment if necessary on the field trip? Yes No

- Do you gather the following information on all students attending the field trip:
 - Full name? Yes No
 - Date of birth? Yes No
 - Name and phone number of emergency contact? Yes No
 - Name and phone number of physician? Yes No
 - Physical evaluation completed within the past two years? Yes No
 - Past medical treatment? Yes No
 - Immunizations? Yes No
 - Allergies? Yes No
- Do you take the following steps with respect to prescription and nonprescription medications:

Actions Needed

Actions Needed

-
- Before administering medication, does your school require that medications are in their original container labeled with:
-
- Student's name? Yes No
 - Name of medication? Yes No
 - Instructions for dosage? Yes No
 - Frequency of dosage? Yes No
-
- Do you assess the need for access to AED? Yes No
-
- Do you document all accidents, injuries, and medical care rendered according to your school's medical record and incident report policies? Yes No

At the Location

- After reaching the field trip location, do you address the following topics with students:

-
- What to do if a student is lost or separated from the group? Yes No
-
- Actions to take in an emergency? Yes No
-
- The application of the student code of conduct at the field trip location just as at school? Yes No
-
- How to report an incident or accident? Yes No

- While on the field trip, do employees and chaperones carry:

-
- Communication devices, such as a cellphone or walkie-talkie? Yes No
-
- A list of students attending the field trip? Yes No
-
- A list of employees and chaperones who are trained in CPR, first aid, and AED? Yes No
-
- Medical information for each student, including:
- General information? Yes No
 - Signed medical authorizations? Yes No
 - Medication instructions? Yes No

Evaluations

■ **Students or parents.** After the field trip, do you collect feedback from students or parents on:

-
- Health or safety problems experienced? Yes No
-
- Positive and negative impressions of the field trip? Yes No

■ **Employees.** After the field trip, do you collect feedback from employees on:

-
- The effectiveness of pre-field trip planning? Yes No
-
- Ratings of services provided by vendors and contractors? Yes No
-
- Any problems encountered? Yes No
-
- Suggested improvement for future trips? Yes No

■ **Using feedback.** To identify areas for improvement, do you review:

-
- All feedback collected? Yes No
-
- Incident or accident reports from the trip? Yes No

■ Does your school save all documents used in planning, carrying out, and evaluating the field trip to help plan future trips? Yes No

Actions Needed

Acknowledgment

This checklist was written by Joseph A. Vossen, JD, associate risk management counsel for UE.



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